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ABSTRACT

The multiple perspectives of participants in a program review process at three schools of education were determined, along with the effect of these perspectives on enactment of program review policies. Participating schools were Emporia State University, which has a large teacher education program, and the University of Kansas and Kansas State University, both of which are comprehensive research institutions with highly visible and politically sensitive schools of education. The objective was to understand the evolution of the program review process as it occurred over time. A case study approach involved document review over an 11-month period; nonparticipant observation; and interviews with 48 university staff, Kansas Board of Regents members, and legislative staff who had participated in program review. Problems included: people holding positions in the universities changed over the period of the education review; school of education faculty, staff, and administrators tended to have a negative view about the review process, while university administrators, board members, and legislative staff tended to have positive views; participants were anxious about the review and reluctant to share information about the review process, and the political nature of the program review. Implications for research on program review are briefly considered. (SW)

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Problems in Researching Topics Related to Program Review: A Case Study

While there has been much interest recently in the nature and effectiveness of program reviews (Mingle, 1981; Baldridge, Kemerer, and Green, 1982; Melchiori, 1982), little has been done to explore the problems associated with researching the program review process itself. Conducting research on a process while being implemented confronts the researcher with the difficulty of documenting how people are changing, how their ideas are being revised and enlarged, how they are responding to uncertainty and anxiety, and how policies are being "adapted" to suit different contexts. The difficulty is not insurmountable, but portraying logics-in-use demands a different discipline from presenting retrospective reconstructed logics.

The program review process in this study focused on the Schools of Education at three of the seven institutions under the control of the Kansas Board of Regents. Beginning in 1982, the Board had initiated a cyclical program review process whereby each program would be reviewed every five years. Due to the press of the national education reform movement, education programs were reviewed in 1983, one year earlier than originally scheduled. The case study was conducted at three institutions with significantly different scopes and missions.

Both the University of Kansas and Kansas State University were chosen because they are comprehensive research institutions with highly visible and politically sensitive schools of education. Kansas State University has as its primary mission extension and service to the state while the University of Kansas was noted for its research and the five-year extended teacher education program. Emporia State University was chosen because it had a large teacher

education program and has gained recognition for strong programs in the areas of applied research to education and in-service programs for the public school sector.

The purpose of the study was to determine the multiple perspectives of the participants in the program review process and how these perspectives affected the enactment of the program review policies. During the course of the research, several problem areas emerged which are the subject of this study.

Problem Statement

In order to conduct research on a dynamic and fluid process, the researcher selected certain parameters within which the study would be conducted. These parameters included dimensions of time (the length of the study), dimensions of characters (who would be included) and dimensions of scope (what would be investigated) which were then used in a "freeze-frame" approach to investigating the program review process. That is, the study was limited to consideration of changes in program review policy during the period of time under investigation. However, while the researcher was taking the snapshot, the participants were changing their poses and economic, political and personal interventions were occurring which caused the study to increase in complexity. As Ian Mitroff said, "Ideas are like policies; policies, in turn, are like instruments. They either facilitate or they hinder our studies" (1980, p. 514).

The difficulty in conducting research on such a vigorous and impelling process as program review centers on two areas--the participants view of reality and the nature of policy itself. Participants in the program review process present a variety of backgrounds and experiences such as faculty, administrators, legislators and community leaders. Each individual experiences the process from their own pose and this determines their "reality" or

perspective. Because the process is separated physically and the players are constantly changing, the participants act largely without the knowledge of the actions of other participants in the process and must rely on a logics-in-use philosophy rather than a reconstructed logic. Later, the individuals reconstructed logic may reflect knowledge of circumstances unknown at the time of action.

Confounding the problem of multiple perspective of the participants in the program review process is the changing nature of policy itself. Policy statements once uttered or written do not stay as neat little axioms on which all future actions are based. Rather, they are implemented, experienced, and interpreted by the various participants in the process and metamorphoses into entirely new and different policy enactments. Thus, the objective of this study was to examine the multiple perspective of the program review process under three constructs--policy-in-intention, policy-in-implementation, and policy-in-experience.

This raises another problem associated with policy studies--that is, determining what exactly constitutes policy in a given situation. Frequently, the word "policy" has been used to describe different concepts as noted by Klein and Murphy in 1973. They suggested that policy is better defined as a continuum moving from the very generalized statements about the purpose of an organization to specific statements regarding rules in an organization.

In 1984 Guba theorized that the word "policy" has multiple definitions and the type of definition applied in a situation "determines the kinds of policy questions that are asked, the kinds of policy-relevant data that are collected, the source of data that are tapped, the methodology that is used, and finally the policy products that emerge" (p. 63). In examining the literature, Guba found eight basic definitions of policy from which he derived three policy types on which this study is based.

The first type of policy Guba (1984) labeled as policy-in-intention and is distinguishd by assertion of intents or goals, standing goals, guides to discretionary actions and strategies to solve or ameliorate problems. Policy-in-implementation was characterized by behaviors or activities demonstrated in the process of implementing policy. Such behaviors or activities were defined by Guba (1984) as sanctioned behaviors, norms or conducts, and the cumulative output of the policy-making system. The third type of policy referred to by Guba was classified as the policy-in-experience and represented the constructions or perceptions of the individuals as they experienced the policy enactment. The three constructs were applied to the program review process to determine what happens when participants change their minds, when political and economic considerations are applied on top of policy enactments and when the participants do not share a common reality but rather have multiple and fluctuating perspectives.

Research Methds

Since the primary concern of the study was to understand the evolution of the program review process as it occurred over time, the use of survey research was inappropriate. Rather the methodology used to gather data and information regarding the research inquiry evolved naturally out of the conditions of the study (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). The conditions of this study were such that the participants, processes, and institutions were all dynamic and fluid. Therefore, it was necessary within this study to discover whatever patterns of perspectives individuals involved with the program review perceived about the process. The research questions were formulated in order to investigate the complexities of the process within its natural context and to derive understandings about the behaviors from the subjects' own frame of reference (Bogdan, 1982).

An inductive strategy was employed for this study, beginning with specific observations regarding the process of program review and building toward general patterns. This is generally referred to as developing grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and according to Lincoln and Guba (1982) is especially well-suited for naturalistic studies. For the purpose of this study, the case study method was the approach recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) because it allowed a reconstruction of the respondents' constructions, built on the readers' tacit knowledge, and helped demonstrate the interplay between inquirer and respondent.

In order to increase the likelihood that the widest range and scope of data would be uncovered, purposive or theoretical sampling was used.

> In naturalistic investigations, which are tied so intimately to contextual factors, the purpose of sampling will most often be to include as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions; hence maximum variation sampling (a form of purposive sampling) will usually be the sampling mode of choice. The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 201).

Therefore, the sampling was not intended to be representative but to provide as wide a range of viewpoints as possible. The three institutions chosen to be sampled in the study were selected because they represented critical cases. According to Patton (1980), using the sampling strategy of critical cases allows "logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases because if it's true of this one case, it's likely to be true of all other cases" (p. 105).

The researcher employed three techniques of the case study methodology including non-participant observation, interviews and document review in gathering the data. The documents and records were examined and collected over an eleven-month period while the researcher was on-site at one of the locations. Content analysis was employed as the method for the analysis of documents and records. "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 240).

Interviews were conducted with forty-eight individuals including faculty, staff and administrators at the three institutions, selected members and former members of the Kansas Board of Regents, Board of Regents staff, and legislators who had participated in the program review. Since the basis of the inquiry was to search for the multiple perceptions regarding the process of program review, non-standardized, open-ended interviews were used.

The coding procedure for this study was initially determined by the research questions. These categories included types of policy statements, politicial, social or economic issues, process statements, centrality, quality and societal demand issues, and characteristics of internal and external models of review. As the study progressed, new categories were added and additional sorts were made. At the conclusion of the study, sixteen categories were used for the analysis of the data.

Data analysis was performed simultaneously with data collection by adapting a commonly used computer program Multiplan to the task of sorting and retrieving the data. The researcher found that by using the computer as a tool to manage, retrieve and organize the data into a variety of patterns, the research was greatly facilitated. Conrad and Reinharz (1984) recognized this advantage and maintained that "by taking over many of the mechanical aspects of qualitative

analysis, the computer allows the researcher to devote more of his or her energy to the interpretative or analytic work, which is more significant and rewarding" (1984, p. 9).

The Problems

During the course of the study, the researcher found that the multiple perspectives of the participants and the nature of policy were problematic to four areas of conducting research into the program review process. The first area concerned the multiple perspective of the individuals who participated in the process. Because the process evolved over time, the actors in the process changed. For example, from the time the program review process started at one university until the education review was completed approximately two years later, the institution's president and chief academic officer changed, a new dean of education was appointed, and a new chief academic officer for the Board of Regents assumed office. Along with these organizational changes, the process was also characterized by a fragmented approach. Of the three institutions under study, only one institution had a committee charged with the responsibility of responding to the review from start to finish. Since this was the institution which experienced a high turnover in its top administration, this committee provided the only continuity for the review. The other two institutions followed a decentralized approach whereby one organizational level responded to one phase of the review and passed their report to another organizational level for response. In these circumstances it was difficult to ascertain who was actually responding to the review and how much authority and responsibility were being exercised by the various parties. In one case, two administrative assistants exercised great degrees of control over one School of Education's response. The problem for the researcher became one of identifying and seeking out the individuals who had such responsibilities so that

their perspectives were clearly understood. Frequently, it was the staff members of various deans and chief academic officers that really influenced the manner in which the policy was implemented. Reviewing the internal documents, especially internal memorandum, were an important source for this information.

A second problem associated with researching such a process as program review is allowing for the differing perceptions of the individuals in the process. The study found that those participants in the review process who were faculty members, staff or administrators within the schools or colleges of education had a negative viewpoint about the review process. They indicated that as far as they were concerned, nothing good came from the program review. In contrast, those participants who were university administrators or staff or Board of Regents members or staff, legislators or governor's staff maintained a positive view of the review process.

Since the review process was viewed so differently by the various participants, it is important for the research to allow for these multiple constructions and to reflect them in the findings. To search for a single reality under these circumstances is to deny the validity of these individual perceptions. The researcher found in this case study that the individual felt very strongly about their viewpoints and further they assumed that everyone else participating in the review process shared their same viewpoints. Therefore, faculty members irate over the outcomes of the review assumed that their president was also outraged. This was not the case, and this limited study would suggest that governing boards and presidents should not assume their faculty and deans will perceive the value of program review and welcome it.

Because the review process was on-going and current actions could effect future decisions, there was a high degree of anxiety about the review process

itself. This anxiety was translated into an individual and institutional reluctance to share information about the review process and to be candid in individual remarks. The researcher was effective in gathering the data only through the use of key contacts who were able to acquire access to documents and provide assurances to respondents. Without such cooperation and assistance, it is doubtful that the research could have been completed. Individuals were initially contacted through letters with follow-up telephone calls to secure interviews. All individuals contacted, with the exception of one, were willing to be interviewed. It was after the initial interview, however, that individuals begin to express concern about the inquiry, and follow-up interviews were often different in tone than initial interviews. Also during the initial interviews, the researcher asked for access to relevant documents and records. In all cases permission was granted for access to the documents and records but when the researcher would make follow-up visits to examine the documents, some documents had disappeared and could not be located. The researcher found it best to gather documents the moment they were made available and to make copies of them for personal safe-keeping. Individuals felt so threatened that in several cases documents were either placed on the researcher's desk when no one was present or mailed to their office without identification as to the source of the documents. While this apprehension can certainly be appreciated given the political nature of the review process, it does complicate the research process and should be considered as a characteristic of the process itself.

The political nature of the program review is in itself a problem to the researcher. The process of program review is a political process in the sense that it represents negotiations, compromises, adaptations and people making judgements and decisions about other people. It was incumbant on the researcher

to know not only as much about an individual perspective as possible but about the political aspects of the review, including the legislature and coordinating/governing body attitudes, in order to effectively understand the process as it developed in the field.

While the process of program review was viewed by board members, staff and administrators as a means of limiting the political effects of decision-making, the overall effect was to heighten the attention on decisions and, in part, acted to increase the politicization of the process. Turf-battles erupted between institutions which further increased the politics of the process. The program review process did not remove the politics from the decision-making arena. In fact, the political environment is not only inescapable, it is so pervasive one ought to expect its influence throughout the process.

This is why, in this instance, and in many other instances, policy-in-intent becomes a new creature--policy-in-implementation which then changes into an entirely new creature--policy-in-experience. One cannot escape the influence of policy because policy is the expression of the one or several value systems which operate in any given environment.

Results and discussion

Given the problems noted in the previous section, how then can research into such dynamic processes such as program review be conducted? Traditional types of research which search for cause and effect relationships and assume a single reality miss the fact that the actors in the processes do not share a common reality. In order to conduct effective inquiry into dynamic processes, one must account for these multiple realities. Mitroff expressed this need when he said, "The realization has grown that observations are neither theory nor value free. One's values and one's theories influence what one sees and

how one interprets it. . . . Indeed, the problem is to show how different values and theoretical structures affect the collection and interpretation of data" (1980, p. 514).

Based on the limited experience of one case study, one solution to the problem is to examine the process from a wholistic sense looking for the larger context of the problem with all of its complexities. The Guba (1984) theory of policy constructs provided an effective framework in which to understand the dynamics of the program review process.

In the beginning the policy-in-intent statements, those statements represented by the official policy statements regarding program review and approved by the Board of Regents in December, 1982, provided the basis on which the process was structured. In general, all participants accepted those goals and objectives, and data were collected to support such goals. For example, in the early stages of the review process, consideration was given to having all the institutions use the ETS surveys employed by the University of Kansas graduate school.

However, during the implementation stage of the process, various participants began to make changes in the process, usually to achieve some other purpose than the ones stated in the original policy statements. Evidence of this was seen when the education reviews were moved up one year to gain added attention.

Nevertheless, it was only when the researcher interviewed the various participants in the process that the differences in policy-in-experience were noted. It was found that each individual, based on his or her own experience, background and organizational perspective, had assigned different values and meanings to the various activities in the process. Therefore, what the Board had intended as the goals of the process were altered by both the intervening

policies of the implementation stage and the individual attitudes of the participants as they experienced the policy actions. The process was perceived differently institutionally and individually. The recognition and awareness that policy does change over time is an important factor to be considered by both governing boards and administrations. The Guba description of policy types would suggest that policy will change from intent to implementation to experience and that such changes should be expected by those involved in the program review process.

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